United Nations

Press Release

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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Security Council holds consultations to discuss Secretary-General's report on guidelines for arms embargo against Iraq.

- Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees steps up food distribution to meet "desperate" needs of millions of people in Horn of Africa.

- Secretary-General, on official visit to Guinea, meets with President of country.

- United Nations Development Programme allocates $1.1 million for reconstruction and rehabilitation of Bangladesh.

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The Security Council was holding consultations this afternoon to discuss the report of Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuélla on the guidelines for an arms embargo against Iraq. The Secretary-General was asked by the Council, in its cease-fire resolution of 3 April, to provide it with such information.

Talking to correspondents about the Council's deliberations, the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom, Sir David Hannay, said that in the view of his delegation, the guidelines recommended by the Secretary-General were "excellent". However, he said, a resolution was needed for the guidelines to obtain legal effect.

In reply to a question about the possibility of removing the current sanctions against Iraq, Sir David said there was no support in the Council for changing the sanctions. When asked about the withdrawal of allied forces from northern Iraq, the British Ambassador said the matter was still being discussed, but no dates had been set.

In a separate development, the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO) reported yesterday that the repatriation of Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq was continuing apace on all fronts.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

In a report issued at headquarters, the agency said that large informal groups were reluctant to return to their homes or were unable to leave from both the area along the Turkey-Iraq border and the marshes astride the Iranian border.

The agency said that uncertainty was still felt and watchfulness maintained, particularly with regard to the need for adequate food for those still in transit and those settling back home. According to the World Food Programme (WFP) only some 10 per cent of the requirement of $64 million had been met and additional orders could not be placed without further contributions to cover the gap.

The UNDRO reported further that the current situation coupled with any hold-up in the deployment of United Nations security guards might trigger major reverse movements. Of the nearly $35 million that was requested from the international community to pay for the guards, so far only $4.5 million had been pledged, the agency said.

In reply to questions by correspondents, a United Nations spokesman said earlier today that it was hoped that the Governments that had clamoured for the presence of the United Nations security guards in northern Iraq would be forthcoming with the funds. Out of some 500 expected security guards in the area, there were currently 50 in place, he said.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is reinforcing its presence in the Horn of Africa, where an on-going lack of security has prevented any major food distribution to millions of people for the past 15 days.

According to an agency representative in Addis Ababa, the needs in the camps were "desperate". He added that UNHCR officials had been effectively cut off from the camps for the past two weeks.

The UNHCR reported that nearly 250,000 refugees had fled Ethiopia into Sudan, Djibouti and Kenya -- countries whose hospitality and resources were already overstretched by prior refugee influxes.

The UNHCR and other United Nations agencies were airlifting tens of thousands of tents, plastic sheeting, high-nutrition biscuits and other food items to Ethiopia's neighbours to help cope with the new refugee flows, a communiqué from the agency stated today, and additional staff were being sent to Djibouti.

The agency said further that international field workers in southern Sudan had reported an influx of between 80,000 and 100,000 refugees from the western Gambela district of Ethiopia. That group, it said, included nearly the entire population of Sudanese refugees from the UNHCR camp at Itang near Gambela, as well as Ethiopians from two other tribes.

(more)

According to the communiqué, UNHCR officials in Addis Ababa had expressed concern about the safety of refugees fleeing into southern war-torn Sudan to escape violence in western Ethiopia and had appealed to authorities in Ethiopia to provide security to refugees in the two remaining camps.

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The Secretary-General, currently in Guinea on an official visit, today met with the President of that country, Lansana Conte. They discussed political changes in Guinea, in particular the democratization process leading up to legislative elections in 1992. The President briefed Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar on the economic situation in Guinea, and they spoke about regional conflicts in Africa and the resulting refugee problem in Guinea, with special attention to the role of UNHCR.

During a meeting with the Minister for Planning and Cooperation and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guinea, the Secretary-General received a detailed briefing on the economic situation in the country. Among other topics covered in the meeting were the situation in Liberia, the refugee problem in Guinea and the internal reform being carried out in the country.

Speaking to the press in Conakry yesterday, the Secretary-General, in reply to a question regarding South Africa, said that he would soon be submitting a report to the General Assembly on the situation in that country. He said he had already met in Abuja with Nelson Mandela of the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC) as well as with representatives of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC). The Secretary-General said he intended to complete the contacts and, "if necessary, send a mission for an up-to-date assessment of the situation".

To a question regarding the Middle East, the Secretary-General said he was following with interest the peace initiatives undertaken by the United States. However, he said, any solution to the problem should include the participation of the United Nations.

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The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has approved $1.1 million to help the Government of Bangladesh identify and meet the country's post-emergency reconstruction and rehabilitation needs and improve its ability to cope with future natural disasters.

That action is in direct response to the April cyclone which had left an estimated 135,000 Bangladeshis dead and thousands more homeless. The cyclone had also destroyed water wells, hospitals and other buildings, roads and bridges, as well as crops and livestock. The Government is seeking $1.3 billion for emergency relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation.

According to UNDP, the funds will be used to set up a Disaster Management and Coordinating Unit in the Ministry of Relief, which serves as the focal point for monitoring and coordinating disaster relief, and to prepare a programme which includes coastal protection and warning systems.

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